CLAIM AMENDMENTS

Before claim 1, please change ~~Claims:~~ to WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for recovery of plant sterols and tocopherols from deodorization distillates formed during chemical or physical refining of vegetable oils, by distillation or saponification of the components present, ~~characterized in that~~ which comprises the steps of

i) removing free fatty acids ~~are removed~~ from the deodorization distillate by vacuum distillation or by continuous solvent saponification to obtain a material comprising sterols, tocopherols, hydrocarbons, mono-, di- and triglycerides as main components,

ii) after the removal of the free fatty acids, reacting the ~~received~~ obtained material ~~consisting of~~ comprising sterols, tocopherols, hydrocarbons, mono-, di- and triglycerides as main components ~~is reacted~~ with an aromatic carboxylic acid anhydride having at least 7 carbon atoms at a temperature of 50 - 150°C, under reduced pressure ~~during~~ over 0.5 - 2 hours,

iii) after the treatment with anhydride, removing tocopherols ~~are removed~~ from the reaction mixture of step ii) by applying short-path distillation, and

iv) recovering crystalline free sterols ~~are recovered~~ from the distillate residue containing sterol esters, di- and triglycerides by transesterification.

2. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that the raw material~~ wherein the deodorization distillate is a deodorization distillate ~~received~~ obtained during refining of sunflower, rapeseed, soybean and corn oil.

3. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1i) ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the free fatty acids are distilled in a distillation column or in a film evaporator at a pressure of 0.1-8 mbar at temperatures ranging from 180 to 250°C.

4. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1i) wherein the free fatty acids are saponified in a medium of polar/apolar solvents at 10-40°C temperature, ~~during~~ over 0.5-5 minutes in presence of a slight excess of alkali, and the free fatty acids are removed by separating the polar phase.

5. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1ii) ~~characterized in that~~ wherein a benzoic, benzyl, phenoxyacetic, phthalic, or substituted phthalic acid anhydride is applied as carboxylic acid anhydride.

6. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1ii) ~~and 5 characterized in that~~ wherein the anhydrides are applied in an excess limited to 5 mol% over the amount of sterols determined by gas chromatographic analysis.

7. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1iii) ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the short path distillation of tocopherols is performed at 0.01 - 0.1 bar pressure applying 200 - 260°C.

8. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1iv) ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the sterols are recovered from the 20-60 weight% sterol-ester containing residue of tocopherol distillation, applying transesterification, ~~preferably~~ in presence of sodium methylate catalyst.

9. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 8 ~~characterized in that~~ wherein during said transesterification of sterol esters, the distillation residue rich in sterol esters is added continuously to [[the]] a refluxed sodium methylate solution and the reaction is made complete within 2-4 hours.

10. (Canceled)